



DPPC Team 🇺🇸 • Dec 20, 2020

Peace Process Update: Dec 20

On December 2nd, the Afghan and Taliban negotiating teams announced they had reached an agreement about the rules and procedures to govern their peace talks. By December 15th, both sides released a comprehensive list of demands for the peace talks and announced they would take a break from negotiations, but not before agreeing to resume on January 5th. This breakthrough is the first sign of progress after months of a stalemate.

In the new year, the two sides will start to negotiate details of a peace deal that hinges on several thorny issues, including a ceasefire. The Afghan side wants an immediate ceasefire, listing a “permanent and countrywide ceasefire” at the top of their list of demands. The Taliban listed “permanent ceasefire” last on their list of twenty four demands. For their part, the U.S. and NATO allies are in favor of a ceasefire. U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted that the two Afghan sides had agreed on a three-page document “codifying rules and procedures for their negotiations on a political road map and a comprehensive ceasefire,” calling it an outstanding achievement.

Khalilzad said this agreement demonstrates that the two opposing sides can agree on difficult issues. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo welcomed the development, adding that the United States would “work hard with all sides in pursuit of a serious reduction of violence and ceasefire.”

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Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, violence has reached an all time high. There is fighting between the Taliban and the ANDSF in all but a handful of provinces, targeted assassinations and bombings that kill innocent civilians are a nearly everyday occurrence in major cities. In a rare occurrence since the U.S.-Taliban agreement was signed in February, U.S. forces conducted an airstrike against Taliban insurgents in Kandahar Province to protect the ANDSF.

The attacks against Afghanistan's free press continued on December 10th, in Jalalabad, when a female journalist was brutally murdered on her way to work. Malalai Maiwand, a television and radio presenter for a private media outlet in Jalalabad, was shot by gunmen as she was traveling in her car. The twenty-six year old Maiwand's death marked the third targeted assassination of a news media personality in just over a month. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack, and Taliban Insurgents denied involvement.

In Washington, lawmakers passed the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which included provisions to block a rapid drawdown of American troops from Afghanistan. The NDAA measure allows Congress to withhold funding for further troop cuts unless the Pentagon, State Department, and Director of National Intelligence assess how a drawdown could impact U.S. national security, among other criteria. The assessment would be required before troop numbers drop below 4,000, and again before the numbers drop below 2,000, the bill says.

"The conferees reaffirm that it is in the national security of the United States to deny terrorists safe haven in Afghanistan, protect the United States homeland, uphold the United States partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, and protect the hard-fought gains for the rights of women, girls, and other vulnerable populations in Afghanistan," said the conference report, as House and Senate negotiators reached an agreement on a final version of the bill.



DPPC Team · Jan 5

Peace Process Update: Jan 5

Peace Talks Resume as Killing of Civilians Continues; Pompeo Praises Peace Initiative, Acting SecDef and Joint Chiefs Chairman Visit Afghanistan Separately

Negotiating teams from the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents are due to resume peace talks in Qatar today after a three-week break. The negotiations are expected to cover fundamental issues of peace such as a ceasefire and power-sharing after the two sides made progress on procedural rules in December. President Ghani attempted to stall the talks and proposed moving the venue from Qatar to Afghanistan, in Kandahar Province, but the proposal was rejected by negotiators from both sides.

Earlier this week U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hailed President Trump's Afghan peace initiative, calling it a remarkable development. "Every administration since Bush 43 [President George W. Bush] wanted to draw down U.S. troops and forge peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. We did it. Don't just take my word for it," declared Pompeo.

On December 22nd, acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller made an unannounced trip to Afghanistan to meet top Afghan leaders to discuss security issues and the status of the peace process. Secretary Miller met with President Ghani at the Presidential Palace "to discuss the ongoing US military support to the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces amidst a historic opportunity to achieve peace in the country," according to a Pentagon statement. Secretary Miller also met with Gen Scott Miller, the Commander of U.S. troops and the NATO-led coalition, to gain an assessment of the security situation and the progress of the U.S. troop drawdown. Miller's trip to Kabul is the second visit by senior defense officials recently. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, visited

defense officials recently. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, visited days earlier to meet with Afghan and U.S. military leaders to discuss growing concerns about escalating Taliban attacks against the ANDSF.

Meanwhile, a terror campaign and constant high-levels of violence continue to plague the Afghan people, over-shadowing the new phase of peace talks. Targeted killings of civil servants, journalists, and women's rights activists have spiked in recent months with seemingly no end in sight. Rahmatullah Nikzad, a freelance photographer who worked for the Associated Press and Al Jazeera, was assassinated in Ghazni Province on Dec. 21, as was Freshta Kohistani, a women's rights who was gunned down, alongside her brother, on Dec. 24 near her home in Kapisa Province. On Jan. 1, in Ghor Province, another journalist and human rights activist, Bismillah Adil, was shot dead by unknown armed men near Firoz Koh city. Adil's assassination marked the fifth journalist's death in just two months. No group has claimed responsibility for these attacks, though the Afghan government and U.S. military attributes the violence to the Taliban. Colonel Sonny Leggett, the US military Spokesman in Afghanistan, explicitly blamed the Taliban insurgents for the recent killings and made it clear that for the peace talks to succeed, the violence must stop. "The Taliban's campaign of unclaimed attacks and targeted killing of government officials, civil society leaders and journalists must also cease for peace to succeed," said Leggett.

peace



[Blog](#)



DPPC Team 🏠 · Jan 6

Statement by the DPPC about the Violent Assault on the U.S. Capitol

The DPPC condemns the attack in the United States Capitol building on January 6, 2021. While Congress was fulfilling its constitutional duty to certify president-elect Biden's electoral victory, supporters of President Trump stormed the Capitol and violently disrupted the democratic process.

Free exchange of ideas, debate, resolving differences through civil discourse, and democratic engagement has been the bedrock of our republic. Since its inception, one of the most significant tenets of American democracy has been the peaceful transition of power. This unprecedented assault undermined that very cherished, remarkable, and sacred principle.

We extend our condolences to the family of the Capitol Police officer who lost his life during the attack. We also commend Congress for returning to the Capitol so soon after the attack to certify the electoral college results.

This day will go down in history as one of America's ugliest days. But we hope it serves as a lasting reminder that democracy is precious and should not be taken for granted.



DPPC Team • Jan 12

Peace Process Update: Jan 12

U.S. Troop Drawdown Continues Despite Law Barring it; Ghani shuns Khalilzad Amid Discussions of an Interim Government; No Real Progress on the Second Round of Peace Talks

Reuters reported that the Pentagon is continuing to draw down to 2500 troops in Afghanistan despite a new defense law that prohibits further troop cuts unless the Department of Defense provides Congress with a detailed assessment of the risks and impacts.

Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on January 1 that included provisions to block a rapid drawdown of American troops from Afghanistan. The NDAA measure allows Congress to withhold funding for further troop cuts unless the Pentagon, State Department, and Director of National Intelligence assess how a drawdown could impact U.S. national security, among other criteria. The assessment is required before troop numbers drop below 4,000 and again before the numbers drop below 2,000, the bill says.

Amid the start of the new phase of peace talks in Doha, U.S. Peace Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has returned to the region, saying he expects the warring sides to achieve concrete progress in the intra-Afghan talks. In Kabul, Khalilzad met with high-profile political figures to discuss the establishment of an interim government, based on reports from several Afghan news outlets. Reports also claimed that President Ghani wanted no part in discussions about an interim government, and refused to meet with Khalilzad. Speaking in an interview with CNN on Jan 11, President Ghani, who was joined by First Lady Rula Ghani, said that his primary goal is to hand power to his elected successor and through the will of the people. Ghani ostensibly responded to the media by saying he would not be part of the peace

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Meanwhile, no tangible progress has been made since the start of the second round of intra-Afghan talks. Negotiating teams from the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents held a preparatory meeting on Jan 6, but there have been no substantive updates since then.



DPPC Team  • Jan 14

Young Afghan Woman Embraces Entrepreneurship

This month, the [IFC](#) shared a story about Selsela Nihan, a young female entrepreneur in Afghanistan. In the article, part of their “Stories of Impact” series, they describe how Selsela returned to Afghanistan, after living abroad as a refugee for more than a decade, and pursued her dream of opening up a clothing store.

While this might seem like an easy task, and while more young women are choosing to become entrepreneurs in Afghanistan, it is still difficult for women to break into the Afghanistan business sector.

In the article, Selsela describes the difficulties women face when opening up a business, including financial issues, security issues and cultural barriers. In Afghanistan, the normal process of opening a business requires going through four methods of registration, however, high levels of corruption, social constraints, and stigma towards women prolong this process. According to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, more than 1,150 female entrepreneurs have invested nearly \$77 million USD in various businesses over the past two decades in Afghanistan. These investments have also secured jobs for over 77,000 people across the country.

Selsela is part of the young generation of Afghan women who are breaking down social and cultural barriers and doing their part to build a better future for all Afghans through entrepreneurship in their communities.

The DPPC is proud to hear stories like Selsela's and is supportive of efforts to empower women in Afghanistan.



Photo Credit: First MicroFinance Bank of Afghanistan

DPPC Team  • Jan 21

DPPC Applauds Biden Administration's Call for Sustainable Peace, Protecting Gains of Women and Girls

President Joe Biden's new administration has signaled its intent to change U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Biden's nominee for Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, said he would conduct a review of the U.S. Taliban Agreement, indicating he had not seen the entire agreement, in a confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

In a strong show of commitment to the Afghan people, Blinken responded to questioning from Senator Jeanne Shaheen about Afghanistan by stating, "I don't believe that any outcome that they might achieve is sustainable without protecting the gains that have been made by women and girls in Afghanistan over the last 20 years."

The DPPC is very pleased with this initial show of support by the Biden Administration to the Afghan people and we are hopeful that the administration will implement policies that make a sustainable peace agreement possible.



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Press Release



DPCC Team · Jan 23

Peace Process Update: Jan 23

Biden Administration to Review Afghanistan Policy; No Major Progress in Doha; Afghan Parliament, Government Spar Over Budget and Ministers

On January 20, Joe Biden was sworn in as 46th President of the United States, marking a new era for America — and possibly Afghanistan. Biden's new administration has signaled its intent to change U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Biden's nominee for Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, said he would conduct a review of the U.S.-Taliban agreement, indicating he had not seen the entire agreement, in a confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. In a strong show of commitment to the Afghan people, Blinken responded to questioning from Senator Jeanne Shaheen about the peace process by stating, "I don't believe that any outcome that they might achieve is sustainable without protecting the gains that have been made by women and girls in Afghanistan over the last 20 years." In a separate confirmation hearing, President Biden's nominee for Secretary of Defense General Lloyd Austin said that he wants the war in Afghanistan to end but didn't commit to ending it quickly. Austin stated that the war needs to end and an agreement should be reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents, but the US doesn't want Afghanistan to become a haven for terrorists again.

In Doha, there has not been any progress at the peace talks, as both sides continue to debate the agenda for future talks. The Afghan government accuses the Taliban of not actively participating and showing interest in the talks, warning that it will not release any more Taliban prisoners since the previous prisoner releases have caused the surge in violence. For the moment, it seems, however, that both the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents and the Biden administration

insurgents and Pakistan are waiting for policy directions from the new Biden administration. A slow pace of talks in Doha has been accompanied by new waves of violence and terror in Afghanistan, with a recent series of targeted assassinations of officials, judges, journalists, and rights activists. Two female Afghan Supreme Court members were viciously murdered in a horrible attack by shooters as they were heading to the workplace in the morning.

In Kabul, amid the rumors of discussions about an interim government by U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and several Afghan politicians participating in the peace effort, the US chargé d'affaires, Ross Wilson, tweeted on Jan 13 that the US is 'not advocating' an interim government in Afghanistan. "We have not advocated, and the US is not advocating an interim government. The outcomes of Afghanistan peace negotiations are up to Afghans, and we believe those outcomes should reflect the wishes and aspirations of the Afghan people," Wilson declared.

Meanwhile, tensions are high between the Afghan government and the Afghan Parliament over the latter's rejection of the FY21 national budget draft. Parliament has rejected President Ghani's proposed budget twice in the past few weeks as Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani stated his intent to postpone the Parliament's winter recess until the budget is passed, even if Parliament has to pass its version of the budget. The showdown over the budget is unfolding amid another standoff after the Parliament rejected several of the President's ministerial appointees and appointee for central bank governor, and the President responded by ordering the appointees to remain in office and continue fulfilling their duties, despite their no longer having any constitutional authority.

Below are some of the issues in the budget the Parliament has identified and inquired to the Ghani administration about, requesting amendments be made:

- Not a balanced budget
- Unfair to government workers, does not provide an equal pay scale
- Allocated money for provinces in a discriminatory fashion

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- Not a balanced budget
- Unfair to government workers, does not provide an equal pay scale
- Allocates government funds to the provinces in a discriminatory fashion
- Lack of transparency on how U.S. and allied donor funds have been spent in 2020 and will be spent in 2021, including for the National Dinner Table Program
- It allows the office of the President to continue using codes for emergency government funds to avoid Parliamentary oversight on such things as salaries, homes, and vehicles for political consultants, operating a standalone and recently created procurement department, paying ministry expenses, and purchasing supplies for the security ministries, without their input or approval
- It omits many development projects of national importance that are partially funded and underway, including the elimination of the Rural Road Construction program

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DPPC Team 🇺🇸 • Jan 27

Thank You For Doing Your Part

The Afghan-American Call-in Day Was a Success Because of You!

Dear Friends,

Congratulations, we have a lot to be proud of!

Yesterday, over 500 Afghan Americans came together in a first of its kind event to engage in the democratic process. Together we spoke with one voice to ask our representatives in Washington to support our family and friends in Afghanistan.

The DPPC is so thankful for the enthusiasm and participation of thousands who visited our website and Facebook page yesterday from the Afghan American community across the country in states such as California, New York, Virginia, Maryland, Connecticut, Nevada, Indiana, and Texas, as well as strong encouragement from many back in Afghanistan including the reformers in Parliament. We are also grateful for the help of several Afghan American organizations, community groups, and community organizers who mobilized their networks to support the call-in day.

While today is a day to celebrate, our fight is just beginning. Effecting change in a democratic system takes time, patience, and repetition. It requires us to be organized as a community so we can have a greater impact. We are proud of the thousands of Afghan-Americans

Indiana, and Texas, as well as strong encouragement from many back in Afghanistan including the reformers in Parliament. We are also grateful for the help of several Afghan American organizations, community groups, and community organizers who mobilized their networks to support the call-in day.

While today is a day to celebrate, our fight is just beginning. Effecting change in a democratic system takes time, patience, and repetition. It requires us to be organized as a community so we can mobilize the hundreds of thousands of our fellow Afghan-Americans and the many organizations and groups that work in our community. By working together, we have a better chance of achieving our goals.

I call on you to stay engaged with the DPPC and our mission. Sign up for alerts on our website. Follow us on Facebook and share the stories we post. Participate in upcoming events and call-in days. If you work for an Afghan American community organization or group, please get in contact with us. Our agenda is not about one person, or one organization, or one policy, we are here to help the entire community and to help the youth of Afghanistan achieve better, safer lives than the generations that came before them.

Once again, thank you for the immense love and support.

Sincerely,

Martin Amin Rahmani
Executive Director

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DPPC Team 🇺🇸 • Jan 29

Young Afghans Use Arts and Modeling to Hope For A Better Future

This week, [TOLOnews](#) shared the story of young Afghan artists who utilize painting and calligraphy to express hope for peace and find comfort in uncertain and distressing times. The article describes how the young artists focus their art on the positive aspects of Afghan society.

The young painters and calligraphers embrace art as a lifestyle to enhance their self-worth and well-being. In major Afghan cities, particularly in the capital Kabul, one can come up across many walls and fortifications filled with paintings and graffiti that portray violence and carnage. While this is also an art that reflects a nation's voice tired of war, that's not the whole story of Afghanistan's youth. A new generation of Afghan artists makes artwork about nature, beauty, peace, and other cultural themes. Afghan youth have passions, dreams, and ambitions like all other young people. Young Afghans also turn to arts for inspiration, entertainment, and just for fun. For instance, last month, sixty female and male models attended a [modeling show](#) in Kabul to compete for Miss and Mr. Afghanistan 2020. The attendees wanted to improve their modeling skills and explore new personal and professional opportunities. Afghanistan has one of the highest proportions of young people in the world; more than 70% of its population is under the age of 25.

Afghan youth have come a long way from the ugly days of the 1990s where the young generation barely had any personal freedoms, let alone following their passions and having fun. The DPPC supports a better and safer future for all Afghans, especially young women and men.



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Peace Process Update: Feb 3

Biden Critical of U.S.-Taliban deal; Afghan Study Group Releases Final Report, Afghan Parliament Forms Committee to Monitor, Participate in Peace Process; NATO Officials Say Troops Might Stay Beyond May 1

The Biden administration is increasingly sounding alarms over the US-Taliban peace agreement signed almost a year ago in Qatar by the Trump administration. Biden believes that the deal is “fundamentally flawed” and has indicated that he will pursue a tougher stance towards the Taliban as his administration began a review of the agreement. National security advisor Jake Sullivan said the administration will take “a hard look at the extent to which the Taliban are in fact complying” with the agreement. The White House, Pentagon, and State Department have signaled that a U.S. troop withdrawal in May is not likely given that the Taliban insurgents are failing to reduce violence and cut ties with Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups. Pentagon Spokesman John Kirby said that: “Without the Taliban meeting their commitments to renounce terrorism and to stop the violent attacks on the Afghan national security forces, and by dint of that, the Afghan people, it’s tough to see a specific way forward for the negotiated settlement.” President Biden has decided to keep on veteran U.S. diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad, who negotiated the 2020 peace deal and who is one of only a handful of Trump administration foreign policy officials that have been asked to stay on with the Biden administration.

The Afghanistan Study Group at the U.S. Institute of Peace released its long-awaited report with policy recommendations for the Biden Administration. The report recommends that the Biden Administration should take this unique opportunity at peace to focus the U.S. diplomatic and military missions in Afghanistan on the pursuit of a sustainable peace agreement that protects U.S. national security interests, and the will of the Afghan people. It also highlighted several issues that the U.S. must address in order to achieve a peace agreement including, the significant rise in Taliban violence and targeted assassinations, the

agreement including, the significant rise in Taliban violence and targeted assassinations, the need to support democratic institutions and elections, the need to preserve the gains of women, minorities, and civil society, the need to delay an immediate troop withdrawal in favor of a conditions-based withdrawal, and the need for accountability from both the Taliban and the Afghan government throughout the peace process.

"Our long involvement in Afghanistan has resulted in achievements that are in our interest to preserve. Although Afghanistan's institutions are imperfect, mechanisms have been put in place that allow for social inclusion, representative government, and the consolidation of the rule of law, and these remain the best way in which Afghanistan's diverse communities can coexist within a stable polity. In the ongoing negotiations, the representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban will need to find creative compromises between their different worldviews. It is not within the mandate of the Study Group to judge what these compromises might be, but Afghanistan's stability depends on it having political institutions that are representative, inclusive—including of women and minorities—and based on a legal system that embodies the aspirations of the Afghan people for justice."

The report also highlights a general sense of disillusionment among U.S. policymakers about Afghanistan's government that threatens the peace process. *"A key consideration of the Study Group was that while we support the values of the Afghan government and recognize that its collapse could create significant problems for the region and beyond, U.S. decisions about America's presence in Afghanistan cannot be held hostage to the divisions, ineffectiveness, corruption, and shortsightedness that the Afghan government has too often displayed."*

In Kabul, the Afghan Parliament has formed a committee to monitor and get directly involved in the peace talks. The committee was established in response to strong concerns among MPs and their constituents that the opportunity for peace is slipping away and the government is putting up roadblocks to peace. In the Peace committee's first hearing this week, Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani addressed the 21 MP committee members, stressing the vital importance of the peace process for the future of Afghanistan and the fate of the republic.

concerned parties. The proposal preserves the constitution and the structure of the republic but calls for replacing the current Ghani administration with an interim government. Rahmani noted the need for an immediate end to Taliban violence and pointed out several issues with the peace proposal that the committee needs to review. The Speaker also welcomed the opportunity to pursue all paths to peace and vowed to ensure that Parliament removes all obstacles and delays reaching an agreement.

The Parliamentary peace committee will immediately begin meeting with the High Council for National Reconciliation, the government body that oversees the Republic's negotiation team in Doha, as well as civil society groups, regional countries, and NATO member governments. The peace committee members will provide regular briefings to the full Parliament so that MPs can stay informed throughout the process. If, and when, an agreement is reached, the constitution mandates that Parliament holds a vote to ratify the agreement. Many MPs have publicly stated that they will do so only if there's a sustainable peace that preserves the hard-fought gains of Afghan men and women over the last 20 years. The Ghani administration has publicly opposed the idea of an interim government for several months. Speaking at an Aspen Security Forum event last week, President Ghani indicated that an interim government would lead to bloodshed and would be detrimental to Afghanistan. However, following Speaker Rahmani's comments this week, a spokesperson for the Ghani administration stated that the government had maintained a flexible stance on peace.

In Doha, though informal talks between the parties continue, official talks between Afghan and Taliban negotiators have stalled. However, the Taliban visited Moscow and Tehran as part of a recent regional tour to discuss the peace process. On Jan 31, Reuters reported that the allied forces fighting with the US in Afghanistan plan to stay there beyond the May deadline envisaged by the insurgent Taliban's deal with the United States, four senior NATO officials said. "There will be no full withdrawal by allies by April-end...Conditions have not been met... And with the new U.S. administration, there will be tweaks in the policy, the sense of hasty withdrawal which was prevalent will be addressed, and we could see a much more calculated exit strategy," one of the officials told Reuters.





DPPEC Team 🏠 • Feb 15

Peace Process Update: Feb 15

US and Afghan Officials Slam Taliban for Violence, Stalled Talks in Doha; Taliban Warns NATO of Prolonged Conflict; Reformers in Afghan Parliament Share their Vision for Peace; Afghans Take to the Streets in Support of Parliament, Equality and Transparency in the Government Budget

The head of the High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah, criticized the Taliban insurgents for avoiding the talks in Doha, arguing that their "hard stance" is not helping the situation and that the Taliban's absence at the negotiation table has stalled the peace talks for over three weeks. General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., the U.S. Central Command commander, said that the level of violence remains too high in Afghanistan and that he's concerned about the actions the Taliban have taken thus far. "The Taliban continue to resort to extreme violence and targeted killings across the country and frequent attacks on the Afghan forces. While they have mostly avoided attacks on US and coalition units, the level of violence is just simply too high, and so that is an action that we look at," declared McKenzie. In a recent interview with CBS, U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham also said that the U.S. forces will not leave Afghanistan by May and that he supports the Biden administration's decision to review the U.S.-Taliban peace deal. "I think we're not going to leave in May. We're going to leave when the conditions are right. The Taliban have been cheating. They haven't been complying. And so, I like what Secretary Blinken and the Biden administration is doing," Graham emphasized.



Similarly, German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass said that German troops in Afghanistan might stay longer than their planned departure date of March, arguing that the Afghan peace process is not going as planned. In the upcoming NATO ministerial meeting next week, the alliance will meet to discuss the future of its mission in Afghanistan. Earlier this month, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that the alliance members must decide "together" on the future of their mission in Afghanistan, indicating that he hopes U.S. President Joe Biden will coordinate more closely with its NATO allies. "If we decide to leave, we risk to jeopardize the peace process, we risk to lose the gains we have made in the fight against international terrorism over the last years. If we decide to stay, we risk continuing to be in a difficult military operation in Afghanistan and we risk increased violence also against NATO troops," Stoltenberg maintained. On February 13th, the Taliban warned the alliance against an extension of its military presence, reminding NATO that it "will be held liable for it just like the last 20 years." Our message to the upcoming NATO

ministerial meeting is that the continuation of occupation and war is neither in your interest nor in the interest of your and our people," the insurgent group declared in a statement.



Having left the negotiation table in Doha, a Taliban delegation visited Turkmenistan as part of their recent regional tour to discuss the peace process. Experts believe that uncertainty over the Biden administration's stance on the U.S.-Taliban agreement, the unclear fate of the remaining Taliban prisoners, and the non-removal of the insurgent group's name from the UN blacklist are among the key reasons why the Taliban have stalled the talks. Violence, however, continues to surge in Afghanistan, with recent blasts and clashes increasingly

targeting civilians. A string of near-daily bombings and targeted assassinations continue to take the lives of government officials, journalists, and activists.

Meanwhile, three reform-minded leaders of the Afghan Parliament published an article in Newsweek titled *Lasting Peace in Afghanistan Must be Afghan Led*, emphasizing the gains Afghan society, women and youth have made over the past twenty years, the need for Afghan leaders to take responsibility for the peace process, the crucial role of the Afghan Parliament, and the U.S. to achieve sustainable and lasting peace. Recognizing the intra-Afghan talks as the best opportunity to end the 40-year war in the country, the authors – Haji Ajmal Rahmani, Mir Haidar Afzaly, and Naheed Farid – argue that Afghanistan is ready to make any sacrifices to secure peace and stability in the country. The reform leaders maintain that the time has come to make real peace with the Taliban and find a meaningful way to integrate the Taliban into the Afghan government and society. However, for that to happen, the three MPs assert the Taliban must be willing to adhere to a ceasefire and agree to preserve the gains of the last 20 years in Afghanistan. “There must be an unconditional ceasefire. The level of violence in our country is devastating, and cannot continue. The rights of women and girls and their role in society is non-negotiable. As are equal rights for all ethnic groups, universal education and healthcare, a free press, sports, entertainment, political parties, academic, social and cultural organizations and the existence of an Islamic Republic with a legislative, judicial and executive branch.”



On the heels of the MPs piece in Newsweek, which called on Afghans to take ownership of their internal politics and democratic system, tens of thousands of Afghans took to the streets in an unprecedented display of democracy, free speech, and show of solidarity with Afghanistan's Parliament. Women and men, government employees, teachers, tribal elders, and residents from all ethnicities and provinces far and wide, including Badghis, Ghor, Paktia,

Kabul, Parwan, Baghlan, Khost, Helmand, Kapisa, Sar-e-Pol, and Badakshan, took to the streets and voiced their strong support for Parliament's fight to demand equality, transparency, and accountability in the government's proposed budget.





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DPPC Team · Feb 23

Parliament Approves National Budget, Secures Victory for Afghan People

Parliament Approves National Budget, Secures Victory for Afghan People, Transparency, Accountability and Oversight of Ghani Administration's Budget and Spending Processes

The Afghan Parliament has approved the third draft of the FY21 National Budget proposal after several months of acrimony between the Parliament and the Ghani administration. The two equal branches of government reached an agreement on nearly all 19 areas of the budget that Parliament sought amendments to. The Parliament's fight to demand equality, transparency, and accountability in the government's proposed budget ended in a resounding victory for all Afghan people and the democratic process in Afghanistan.

Parliament secured key amendments to the FY21 national budget proposal, including a monthly salary increase of 2,000 Afghanis for teachers and ordinary government employees, removing the controversial National Dinner Table Program from the budget, increasing Parliamentary oversight authority of future budgets, allocating 4.4 billion Afghanis for critical development projects, eliminating lavish expense payments for high ranking government officials, limiting excessive salaries for government employees, limiting the use of discretionary and emergency Codes (91, 92), and removing low priority government programs.

Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani thanked all the MPs, particularly the members of the Finance and Budget Committee, for their time, effort, and commitment to the budget process. "Today is an important and historic day for the members of the 17th Parliament and the people of Afghanistan. After two months of struggle, you succeeded in your attempt to represent the legitimate interests of the Afghan people by ensuring equality and justice in the national budget."







parliament

budget

afghanistan

government

transparency

oversight

accountability



DPPC Team 🏠 • Feb 23

Afghanistan Study Group Testifies Before Congress; Voices Strong Support for Afghan Women

Afghanistan Study Group Testifies Before Congress; Voices Strong Support for Afghan Women, Serious Concerns about Corruption and Accountability in the Afghan Government

On Friday, February 19, 2021, the House Oversight and Reform Committee, Subcommittee on National Security, held a hearing to discuss the final report published earlier this month by the Afghanistan Study Group (ASG). The Subcommittee heard testimony from the three co-chairs of the Afghanistan Study Group: former Senator Kelly A. Ayotte, General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., and Nancy Lindborg.

The ASG final report recommends the Biden Administration take this unique opportunity at peace to focus the U.S. diplomatic and military missions in Afghanistan on the pursuit of a sustainable peace agreement that protects U.S. national security interests and the will of the Afghan people. The comprehensive report highlights several critical issues including, the significant rise in Taliban violence and targeted assassinations, the need to support democratic institutions and elections, the need to preserve the gains of women, minorities, and civil society, the need to delay an immediate troop withdrawal in favor of a conditions-based withdrawal, and the need for accountability from both the Taliban and the Afghan government throughout the peace process.

Several members of Congress, including Committee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney, voiced strong support for Afghan women, civil society, and the need to preserve the significant gains by both groups. The ASG co-chairs discussed the crucial role of civil society and the democratic gains made in the last 20 years. They also noted that facilitating a sustainable and inclusive peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban that supports the human rights of all Afghans, particularly women, is essential to U.S. national security interests. "We highlighted the issue of women's rights and values in a future Afghanistan consistent with the Constitution for two reasons. And it wasn't just because it was the right thing to do, we actually assessed that stability and security cannot be achieved unless we have a future Afghanistan consistent with the values in the Constitution and unless women's rights are respected," General Dunford stated.

Acknowledging there is no military solution to end the war with the Taliban, the ASG co-chairs emphasized that reaching a long-lasting political settlement requires conditionality on all sides. "Conditionality includes the reduction of violence by the Taliban and a demonstrated ability by the Taliban to contain terror groups in Afghanistan. And by the Afghan government to deal with corruption and to accept that the Taliban will have some role in the future of Afghanistan. Sustainable peace will not be possible without an inclusive government," Ayotte declared.

The co-chairs also maintained that supporting the Afghan government doesn't mean ignoring or downplaying its corruption and ineffectiveness. Several members of Congress on the Subcommittee asked witnesses about the ongoing corruption in the Afghan government and the continuation of aid. The witnesses testified that aid should be targeted, focused, and in certain areas even withheld if the Afghan government doesn't take certain actions. "We are not recommending a blank check to the Afghan government. The report is clear of ensuring that not just the Taliban but also the government of Afghanistan is held accountable for immediate conditions. The government must engage seriously in the peace negotiations as well as exercise greater responsibility improving corruption. The continued corruption and lack of access to justice for too many of their citizens consistently results in widespread grievances that are easily exploitable by the Taliban," Lindborg said.

The Afghanistan Study Group was created by Congress in December 2019 to “consider the implications of a peace settlement, or the failure to reach a settlement, on U.S. policy, resources, and commitments in Afghanistan.”





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Peace Process Update: Mar 2

Peace Talks Resume; Ambassador Khalilzad Visits Kabul with Peace Plan; Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Reed, NATO Officials, Signal Troops Will Stay Beyond May; Speaker Rahmani Leads a Delegation to Tajikistan

Peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban insurgents resumed in Doha after more than a month-long delay, though the two sides are still negotiating details of an agenda to move forward with the talks. U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad returned to the region to meet with political leaders in Kabul before heading back to Doha. The restart of negotiations in Doha comes amid an increase in shuttle diplomacy throughout the region, including visits by the U.S. Central Command Commander General Kenneth F McKenzie, Russian Envoy Zamir Kabulov, Qatari Envoy Mutlaq Bin Majed Al Qahtani, and Afghanistan envoy Umar Daudzai to meet with Pakistani officials, and Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa. The discussions with Pakistan were focused on a reduction in Taliban violence and a future permanent ceasefire. All sides see Pakistan's role in getting the Taliban back to the negotiating table and influencing them to reduce violence, as a vital component to achieving peace.

As part of the Parliament's ongoing peace efforts, Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani led a delegation of MP's to Tajikistan to meet with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Foreign Minister Sirodjidin Muhriddin, and other officials to discuss the peace process and issues of mutual concern including Afghan refugees and trade. Recognizing Tajikistan's security concerns along its Afghan borders, Rahmani asserted that Afghanistan might face civil war and the situation will get even worse if there is not a responsible withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan. "Ending violence in Afghanistan requires regional cooperation. Peace will not be ensured if Afghanistan's neighbors do not directly engage in the peace process,"

Speaker Rahmani said.

In his remarks at the Munich Security Conference, President Biden maintained that he supports the Afghan peace process to bring an end to America's longest war while assuring that the US will not let Afghanistan become a haven for terrorists again. "My administration strongly supports the diplomatic process that's underway and to bring an end to this war that is closing out 20 years. We remain committed to ensuring that Afghanistan never again provides a base for terrorist attacks against the United States and our partners and our interests," President Biden said.

The U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman, Jack Reed, said that he expects US troop's presence in Afghanistan to be somewhat extended beyond May, though the February 2020 agreement with the Taliban calls for a full American withdrawal in May. "In the short run ... I would expect some extension. Even operationally, I think the military would make the case they need more time, even if they're coming out," Senator Reed mentioned.

In his first news conference as Pentagon Chief, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the U.S. is committed to doing a "thoughtful and deliberate" review of its Afghan strategy. Secretary Austin suggested that progress towards peace and an end to the American presence in Afghanistan depend on the Taliban reducing attacks since the level of violence is soaring. "All of us are mindful of the time that's available, but we're really focused on making sure the negotiation process takes place as it should. Hopefully, the parties will abide by commitments they made at the outset of the negotiations," Austin declared.

Meanwhile in Brussels, following a two-day meeting of NATO defense ministers, the alliance affirmed that no decision had been made on a troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, indicating that it plans to remain until conditions on the ground allow for a long-lasting political settlement to the peace process. For their part, the Taliban published an open letter just a day before the NATO meeting calling on the U.S. to honor the Doha agreement regarding

the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan, arguing that it had committed to its side of the deal. "Now that a year has passed since the signing of the Doha agreement, we urge the American side to remain committed to the full implementation of this accord," read the letter.



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Afghanistan's First All-Female Flight Crew Emblematic of Gains in the Workplace

The Afghan private airline Kam Air recently conducted a 90-minute flight from Kabul to Herat with an all-female crew. This is a first for Afghanistan and a new milestone for Afghan women. Flying the Boeing 737 was a 22-year old Afghan pilot, Mohadesse Mirzaee, joined by Captain Veronica Borysova and four Afghan female crewmembers. According to the [Insider](#), YouTuber Josh Cahill, a popular airline reviewer and traveler, was also invited on board to record the flight as part of an International Women's Day Documentary.

The all-female flight is indicative of the progress Afghan women have made and continue to make despite cultural barriers and threats to their safety. Afghan women are an integral part of the private and public sector in today's Afghanistan, so it is not surprising they are fueling growth in the country's nascent aviation industry. Aviation is among the most competitive, sought-after career fields, and Kam Air is a leading private sector company. Outside of aviation, Afghan women work in nearly all industries including medical, legal, education, media, academia, the arts, politics, the military.

A recent [survey](#) released by the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry points towards a growing trend of female entrepreneurship in Afghanistan. There are nearly 60,000 women-owned businesses throughout the country that are responsible for creating over 130,000 jobs, including over 100,000 jobs for women. Nearly all of these businesses are self-funded, making this collective group of Afghan women one of the largest sources of

private sector investment, and employment in the country.

Just twenty years ago, there were less than 50,000 girls enrolled in Afghan schools, and women faced a significant risk of violence and persecution if they ventured outside the home. Today, there are more than 3.5 million Afghan girls in school and women currently maintain essential roles in a democratic Islamic society whose constitution guarantees their rights and freedom. As the peace process enters its next phase of substantive negotiations, it is imperative that all sides recognize the importance of Afghan women in society and the important role they serve rebuilding and revitalizing Afghanistan's economy.

Happy International Women's Day!





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Peace Process Update: Mar 17

The Biden Administration Proposes Participatory Government with The Taliban; Secretary Blinken's Letter to President Ghani Pushes for UN-Led Peace Conference

During his trip to Afghanistan, the U.S. Special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad proposed the idea of creating an interim government through a UN-brokered international conference between the Afghan and Taliban leaders. First reported by Afghanistan's TOLO News and later confirmed by the Western Media, Khalilzad handed over an eight-page draft peace agreement to several Afghan leaders for review along with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's three-page letter to President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, reflecting the frustration of the Biden administration over escalating violence and a stalled peace process. The draft peace agreement "sets forth principles for governance, security, and rule of law, and presents options for power-sharing that could help the two sides reach a political settlement that ends the war."

The proposal outlines the formation of a "transitional peace government," which would include separate and coequal branches of power, paving the way for the writing of a new constitution and elections immediately afterward. It lays out the terms of a ceasefire and its enforcement, guarantees elections, calls for the protection of women's rights, includes guaranteed rights for religious and ethnic minorities, and protects a free press. As soon as a peace agreement is signed, both sides would need to stop fighting within hours, the proposal maintains.

There are two proposed scenarios for the existing Afghan Parliament under an interim government. The first would preserve the bicameral legislature and expand it to include membership for the Taliban. The second option, one of the most concerning elements of the

proposal, would dissolve the National Assembly, transferring its authority to the executive branch.

There are two proposed options for the executive branch: a similar system that exists today with a President and Vice Presidents, or a new option to have a President and Prime Minister. The draft agreement states that Afghanistan's neighbors will not interfere in the country, Afghanistan will not let its soil be used to launch terrorist attacks against its neighbors and calls on the Taliban to remove all of its political and military structures from neighboring countries.

The proposal calls for a High Council for Islamic Jurisprudence to be formed and provide advice to an independent judiciary to settle conflicts over the interpretation of Islamic law. The proposal also states that the government and the Taliban will each introduce seven members to the High Council, reserving one member to be named by the interim President.

Accompanying the proposal is a blunt letter from Secretary Blinken, declaring that the U.S. wants to see progress in the peace negotiations, and calls on Afghan political leaders to seriously consider the draft peace proposal for an interim government. Addressing the fact that President Ghani has been a strong opponent of the idea of an interim government, and venting frustration over the perceived lack of urgency from the Afghan negotiators, Secretary Blinken said he wants all parties involved to focus on getting a peace agreement signed, "I am making this clear to you so that you understand the urgency of my tone regarding collective work." Secretary Blinken mentioned convening a near-term high-level conference led by the UN in Turkey between the Taliban and the Afghan government which will include the U.S, Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, and India. "It is my belief that these countries share an abiding common interest in a stable Afghanistan and must work together if we are to succeed," he said. The U.S.-backed peace conference in Turkey is expected to happen next month, and the Afghan government has announced that it will attend.

Secretary Blinken's letter recommends "a revised proposal for a 90-day Reduction in Violence, which is intended to prevent a Spring Offensive by the Taliban," followed by a

permanent ceasefire defined in the draft peace proposal. "I must also make clear to you, Mr. President, that as our policy process continues in Washington, the United States has not ruled out any option," Secretary Blinken asserted, including "the full withdrawal of our forces by May 1st." In reaction to Sec. Blinken's letter, Ghani's first Vice President Amrullah Saleh said that the President has received the letter and was unimpressed by its contents, saying that "We are neither concerned about the letter nor has it changed our position." In his speech to lawmakers at the opening session of the Afghan Parliament, President Ghani said that he is ready to discuss fresh elections with the Taliban, insisting that the only way to form a new government is through elections. For their part, the Taliban has confirmed receiving the letter after meeting with Ambassador Khalilzad in Doha, indicating they are reviewing the proposal and will soon take a position.

Meanwhile, Russia intends to hold a peace conference on Afghanistan in Moscow on March 18 and has invited the regional players, the Afghan government, official leaders from Parliament, and various politicians to accelerate the peace process. Both the Afghan government and the Taliban said that they are going to attend the conference. Following Secretary Blinken's letter, President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah held a series of meetings with the Parliament, and various Afghan politicians to consult on the peace process and discuss the draft peace proposal.



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Peace Process Update: April 2

Parliament Expresses Optimism for Turkey Peace Conference; Moscow Meetings Lead to Calls for Immediate Ceasefire, Powersharing Talks; President Biden Signals May 1 Deadline Delay

At the Moscow peace meetings, aimed at jump-starting the Afghan peace process, four countries called on the Afghan government and the Taliban to curb violence and start power-sharing discussions immediately. The U.S., Russia, China, and Pakistan expressed their opposition to the return of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate, adding that any peace agreement must protect the rights of all Afghans, including women and minorities. The summit took place ahead of a significant U.S.-backed, UN-moderated peace conference in Turkey, expected to begin this month.

In his address to a session of Afghan Parliament after returning from the Moscow peace meetings, Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani called the summit an important stepping stone that could accelerate the Afghan peace process, though he expressed concerns about the lack of female participation and the lack of representation for the country's majority population under the age of 30. Speaker Rahmani announced his strong support for the upcoming Istanbul Peace Summit in Turkey, calling it a crucial, constructive, and timely step in the peace process. Speaker Rahmani also mentioned that he wants the Afghan government peace negotiating team to attend the conference with a specific agenda and a common voice to make the most out of the opportunity and help the country reach a durable political settlement.



On his first visit to Afghanistan as the Pentagon Chief, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that the U.S. wants to see "a responsible end" to the Afghan war, indicating that a high level of violence should decrease in order for diplomacy to succeed. In his unannounced trip to the country, as part of the latest efforts by the U.S. and international powers to end the 20-year war, Secretary Austin met with President Ghani and U.S. military and diplomatic leaders. "There's always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there's a lot of energy focused on, you know, doing what's necessary to bring about a responsible end, a negotiated settlement to the war," Austin declared. In a recent interview with ABC News, President Biden said that meeting the May 1 deadline to remove all U.S. troops from Afghanistan was "tough," suggesting that he is "in the process of making that

decision now as to when they'll leave." However, President Biden also said that he expects American troops to be out of the country within a year. In his first news conference as commander in chief last week, Biden said that he "couldn't picture" troops staying in Afghanistan by next year.



Amid signals by President Biden that he might delay the May 1 deadline, some officials in his administration are using an intelligence assessment to persuade him to continue the military mission in Afghanistan. The classified assessment reported by the New York Times predicts that if the U.S. troops leave Afghanistan before a power-sharing agreement is reached

between the warring sides, the Taliban could take over the country within two or three years after the withdrawal of foreign troops. That could mean that Al Qaeda might be enabled to regain its strength within the country, according to U.S. intelligence agencies. On the heels of President Biden's statements, the Taliban initiated a series of attacks against the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces in dozens of Districts throughout the country. In the last week, there were 84 Taliban attacks in 26 Provinces and 56 districts, including one day that saw 19 attacks in 13 Provinces and 17 districts. The Taliban also continued their assassination campaign against young leaders in civil society, the media, and the security forces.



Meanwhile, Reuters reported that President Ashraf Ghani will be responding to Secretary Blinken's draft peace agreement with a counteroffer that rejects the premise of a power-sharing government with the Taliban, and instead proposes an election process that includes the Taliban. At the Heart of Asia summit, a conference held this week in Tajikistan aimed at promoting peace and security in Afghanistan, President Ghani talked about his peace plan and promised that he will step aside after an election was held.